



Predatory publishing: a great concern for authors

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Publishing in scientific journals is a key to academic and professional careers as dissemination is an integral part of being a scholar. Publishing in a high-quality peer-reviewed journal is important for academics, especially for early-career ones, whose career progression may depend on it. Traditionally academics published in paper-based journals which are only accessible through expensive subscription and libraries.

Since the new millennium we have seen a growth in Open Access publishing, meaning that papers are freely available online to readers. However, journals offering Open Access publishing often require a submission fee. A huge numbers of scientific journals exist globally as academic publishing is big business. This in turn has given rise to unscrupulous predatory publishers. Broadly speaking, predatory publishing describes a variety of exploitative practices which includes charging fees for publication/submission/processing, without editorial support or peer review, the most important part of academic publishing. The misuse of Open Access publishing is largely a ploy to make money and unethical.

Academics receive a huge number of generic emails inviting them to submit article submissions to such predatory journals or inviting junior faculty to serve on their editorial boards. You may feel flattered by such a request, but if you have never heard of the journal, ask senior colleagues or

your librarian for advice. Do you, or your colleagues, recognize anyone on the Editorial Board? Be beware editorial credentials can be fake or used without permission. Look at the authors' instructions for details on fees. Proper journals such as Medical Science will state that publication "is not contingent upon the author's ability to pay the charges. Neither is acceptance to pay the handling fee a guarantee that the paper will be accepted for publication." Furthermore, authors who are not be able to pay are advised that they "can request the editorial office to reduce the fee to an amount that the author can afford to pay."

Some predatory journals are easy to spot, e.g. if they sent emails inviting you to submit an article in the next few days for an upcoming issue of a journal, or websites that have lots of errors/typos, fake or odd postal addresses and URL links that do not work. Another sign of a predatory journal is that Editorial Board members listed on the journal's website have either no affiliations, or all are from the same 'obscure' place, or all from completely unrelated disciplines.

Beware if papers are accepted with little or no peer review as peer review is the backbone of academic publishing. A giveaway is offering to publish your paper within 24-48 hours; whereas proper journals can take months (sometimes more than a year) to get from initial submission to appearing in print or being published online.

Sometimes authors don't realize they have been dealing with a predatory journal until they get an invoice for article fees on acceptance. We advise academics not to pay and to resubmit their article to a legitimate journal! So do your homework before you decide to submit your valuable work especially to an unknown journal.

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Competing interests

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